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EARTH



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KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD

"Watcher?"

"No...X-51. You are the Watcher now."

"Is that why you took my face?"

"This is the purpose for which I brought you here...to the moon, yes. But why are you still... distressed that you have been transformed? You were never blood and flesh, but wires and rivets and pistons and..."

"God... it was my face... it was all I had."

"The face of all mankind has changed, X-51. Would you now emulate a race that no longer exists? Would you choose to be a ghost? A ghost in a..."

"No, Uatu. I only..."

"Good. This is your home now. I must know what transpires upon the Earth. I am blind without you. Tell me, X-51, tell me what you see."

EARTH X

CHAPTER ONE

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"I SEE STARS... WAVES OF STARS..."

"...AND THEY'RE BURNING."

"I HEAR...GLASS BREAKING... NO...VOICES...HUNDREDS OF THEM...WHY DO THEY SCREAM?"

"WHAT'S HAPPENING, UATU...? WE'VE GOT TO STOP THIS! I NEED TO GET BACK TO EARTH!"

"TO UNDERSTAND THESE ASHES AND THE PEOPLE THEY ONCE REPRESENTED, LOOK BACK UPON THE MAN WHO WAS THEIR CHAMPION. LOOK UPON STEVE ROGERS...WHO BECAME CAPTAIN AMERICA. HE WAS THE FIRST OF THE NEW RACE."

"NEW RACE?"



"CALM YOURSELF, X-51. ANXIETY IS UNCHARACTERISTIC OF A WATCHER. THE CRIES YOU HEAR ARE A CONSTANT THROUGHOUT HISTORY; YOU WILL GROW ACCUSTOMED TO THEM."

"YOU SEE A FLAG...THAT IS ALL...THE BANNER OF A NATION THAT NO LONGER EXISTS."

"BUT TO HAVE TO WATCH...THAT. IT'S TERRIBLE. WHY SHOW ME, UATU? WHY ASK ME TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING LIKE THIS?"

"BECAUSE IT IS YOUR NATION I SPEAK OF, X-51...YOUR HOME IN ASHES."

"I...DON'T BELIEVE IT. HOW COULD...IT'S ONLY TWENTY YEARS I'VE BEEN AWAY. HOW COULD...?"



"IT WOULD NOT BE UNTIL A MADMAN'S DREAM FOR A MASTER RACE THAT THOSE SEEDS OF CHANGE WOULD GERMINATE. IT WOULD NOT BE UNTIL WORLD WAR II."

"BUT IT WAS NOT ADOLF HITLER WHO INSPIRED STEVE ROGERS TO TAKE HOLD OF HIS DESTINY. NO...IT WAS ONE OF HIS AGENTS...THE RED SKULL."

"SO TERRIBLE, EVEN TO HITLER'S REGIME, WERE THE RED SKULL'S ACTIONS THAT AMERICA FELT A CHAMPION OF THEIR OWN WAS NEEDED TO END THE SKULL'S REIGN."

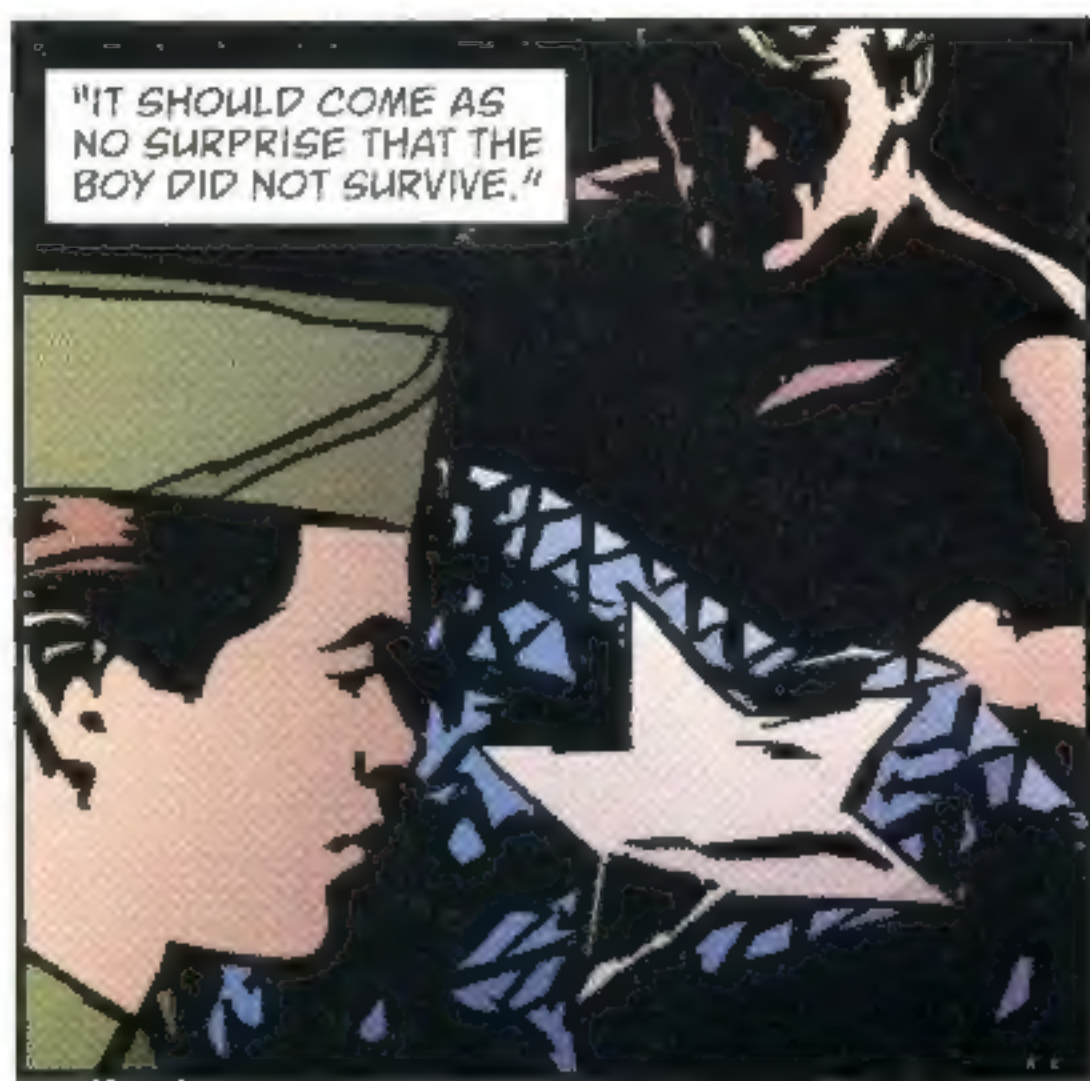


"AND SO, FRAIL STEVE ROGERS WAS SELECTED TO BECOME THE DRUG-ENHANCED SUPER SOLDIER. A MAN WHO WOULD BE MORE THAN A MAN. A SOLDIER WHO WOULD BE A BEACON OF HOPE AND A SHIELD AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD OPPRESS THE HELPLESS...OR SO THE MILITARY PRESS RELEASE PROFESSED."

"HE WAS PARTNERED WITH A BOY NAMED JAMES BARNES. STUPID, REALLY. THE YOUNG BOY WAS AN ANTIQUE COMPARED TO ROGERS."



"IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE BOY DID NOT SURVIVE."



"HOW DID HE DIE?"



"HE WAS KILLED IN THE SAME EXPLOSION THAT SENT CAPTAIN AMERICA INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION. THE TRAP THAT LED TO THIS DEATH WOULD BE TRACED YEARS LATER TO THE RED SKULL."

"ROGERS WAS FOUND DECADES LATER BY THE HALF-BREED OF ATLANTIS, HIS OLD ALLY FROM WORLD WAR II, PRINCE NAMOR. HE WAS FOUND BEING WORSHIPPED IN THE ARCTIC NORTH BY ESKIMOS."

"WHILE MUCH HAD CHANGED IN HIS WORLD WHILE HE SLEPT, SOME THINGS HAD NOT. THE RED SKULL HAD ALSO ESCAPED HIS ERA, AND A WAR THE WORLD WAS STILL REBUILDING FROM BEGAN ANEW BETWEEN THESE TWO OLD ENEMIES."

"CAPTAIN AMERICA WAS HAILED AS A LIVING LEGEND. BUT SOMETHING WAS WRONG, X-51. HE WAS MORE ALONE THAN EVER BEFORE."

"WHEN ASKED TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, HE DECLINED. HIS CONVICTION, HE SAID, WAS THAT HE COULD ONLY REPRESENT THE AMERICAN DREAM...AND NOT A SPECIFIC GENERATION OF CITIZENS."

"I REMEMBER WHEN THIS HAPPENED. A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE REALLY UPSET."

"THEY NEVER FORGOT, X-51. BUT HIS ANSWER WAS TOO PAT. TOO SIMPLE. ROGERS HAD LOST THE ABILITY TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE OF HIS OWN PEOPLE. HIS COUNTRY WAS NO LONGER THE LAND WHERE ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL."

CAPTAIN
AMERICA
FOR
PRESIDENT

"CAPTAIN AMERICA'S VERY EXISTENCE HAD CHANGED THAT."

"WHY? HE HAD ALLIES LIKE THE FALCON AND THE AVENGERS. WHY DID HE FEEL ALONE? WAS IT BECAUSE HE WAS A MAN OUT OF TIME? I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"HIS BODY WAS RESUSCITATED BY A TEAM OF HEROES KNOWN AS THE AVENGERS, EACH OF WHOM HAD AMAZING POWERS OF HIS OWN."

BUT WHY WAS THE
FLAG BURNING? YOU SAID
"THE MAN WHO WAS CAPTAIN
AMERICA"...WHAT
HAPPENED?

"TURN YOUR EYES FROM THE
PAST TO THE PRESENT, X-51,
AND TURN THEM TO EARTH."



"I SEE A SHIP...IT'S
LANDING ON EARTH...
ITS MARKINGS...I'VE
SEEN THEM BEFORE
...THE INHUMANS."



"AH, SO THE SILENT KING
HAS RETURNED AT LAST."

IT'S NOT GOING
TO WORK. NO ONE WILL
BELIEVE THAT AFTER TWENTY
YEARS WE'RE JUST GOING
TO SHOW UP AND...



ONLY YOU LOOK
FOR WEAKNESS IN EVERY-
THING, KARNAK. THERE IS NO
REASON FOR ANYONE TO BE
SUSPICIOUS.

SHOULD
WE BE ASKED,
THE REASON WE
HAVE RETURNED
IS FOR THE ROYAL
WEDDING OF
LUNA AND
MY...



...OUR SON.



"WE ARE HOME
...AT LAST."





WHERE IS THE PRINCE? WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER, LUNA? NO ONE LIVES HERE ANYMORE. KARNAK'S RIGHT. WE SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THIS. IT WAS BLACK BOLT'S IDEA IN THE FIRST PLACE TO...



DO NOT SPEAK WITH THAT TONE WHEN REFERRING TO OUR KING, TRITON. HIS DECREES ARE PERFECT. HIS WISDOM WITHOUT COMPARE. THE QUEEN'S WORDS ARE HIS.



MY SON...HE WOULD BE CONSIDERED A HERO HERE.



WE MUST GO TO WHERE THE HEROES ARE.



WE MUST GO TO NEW YORK CITY.



BE CAREFUL,
REDWING. WE CAN STILL
SAVE THEM!

WHO SAYS
THEY'RE STILL
ALIVE?





IF THERE'S
EVEN A CHANCE,
WE CAN'T RISK
IT!



WE DON'T HAVE
MUCH TIME LEFT, CAP.
WE'VE GOT TO HIT 'EM
HARD AND FAST. YOU
KNOW WHAT STARK SAID.



THERE'S A WAY. THERE
ALWAYS IS. THESE ARE
PEOPLE WE CARE ABOUT,
REDWING. THEY'RE
CONTROLLED BY...



OH HELL.
IT'S YOU.

I'VE
MISSED YOU,
WYATT.



I'VE MISSED YOUR TOUCH.
WE WERE SO CLOSE, ONCE. WE
COULD BE TOGETHER ALWAYS.
PLEASE STOP FIGHTING.

YOU MAY SPEAK
WITH HER VOICE... BUT YOU
ARE NOT JENNIFER.



DO YOU HEAR ME, YOU CRAZY HYDRA
QUEEN!!!! YOU AREN'T HER!

CAP... I
COULD REALLY
USE YOUR HELP
RIGHT NOW.




I'M ON MY
WAY, REDWING.
I'M NOT ABOUT TO
LOSE ANOTHER
PART...



...NER
FALCON. SAM
...NOT YOU,
TOO...

DON'T FIGHT
IT, STEVE. JOIN
HYDRA. IT'S FOR
YOUR OWN
GOOD



IT'S BETTER
THIS WAY, STEVE.
TO BE PART OF HYDRA IS
LIKE BEING IN PARADISE.
YOU WON'T HAVE TO FIGHT
ANY MORE. THERE'S NO
MORE PAIN. NO MORE
ANGER. NO MORE
TEARS.



NO...I
WON'T QUIT...I
DON'T HAVE A
CHOICE.

IT'S NOT
QUITTING,
STEVE. IT'S
LETTING
GO



YOU'VE HEARD
PROPAGANDA BEFORE,
CAP. DON'T LISTEN TO
THESE FREAKS! LISTEN
TO ME, SOLDIER!

THE SQUID CAN
ONLY IMMOBILIZE YOU
IT CAN'T TAKE HOLD OF
YOU UNLESS YOU LET IT...
UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING
TO BECOME ONE OF
THEM...



HE'S
MY FRIEND,
WYATT



PEOPLE WANT TO BE A
PART OF SOMETHING, STEVE. SOMETHING
BIGGER THAN THEIR LIVES. THEY WANT...
THEY NEED A PURPOSE.

THAT'S WHY
SO MANY HAVE
JOINED OUR
RANKS.



YOU'LL THANK
US FOR THIS AFTER
YOU'VE JOINED US, BOY.
YOU'VE PUT UP QUITE A
FIGHT, BUT QUIT YOUR
STRUGGLING.

AND KEEP
YOUR MOUTH SHUT
THIS TIME.



LET THE
BOY GO FREE. HE
DOESN'T WANT TO
JOIN YOU



SAYS
WHO?



"I CAN'T GET USED TO THIS EQUIPMENT, HATHU...I'M SOMEWHERE ELSE AGAIN. I THINK IT'S STILL NEW YORK."

WHAT DO YOU THINK, PARKER? DO YOU GET INVOLVED? DO YOU SAVE SOME POOR SCHMUCK FROM THE BIG, BAD HYDRA?

DOES IT MATTER?

WHO AM I KIDDING? OF COURSE IT DOESN'T.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO OFFER A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE'S GOT SUPER POWERS?

PARKER!
PETER PARKER!

WHO'S GONNA SHOUT "SAVE ME, SAVE ME" WHEN EVERYONE CAN SAVE THEMSELVES?

PETER PARKER!

SPIDER-MAN!!!

SPIDER-MAN? WHO'S CALLING ME?

OH...IT'S YOU

SORRY, SERGEANT CAGE. I'M JUST NOT USED TO HAVING PEOPLE CALL ME SPIDER-MAN ANY MORE...IN OR OUT OF COSTUME.


I DON'T HAVE TIME TO MAKE THIS PRETTY, PARKER. WE'RE MINUTES AWAY FROM A PURGE.

THING IS, I COULD USE SOMEONE LIKE YOU ON THE FORCE SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO USE HIS POWERS. SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES IN...

SORRY, MISTER NOT INTERESTED


"THAT'S YOUR JOB."

IT'S NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, STEVE



YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARRY
THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS
YOU'LL SEE THAT ONCE YOU'RE
PART OF HYDRA.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM,
CAP. THEY'RE ALIEN PARASITES.
THEY'RE THE ENEMY. THINK OF WHAT
THEY'VE DONE. REMEMBER WHO
YOU ARE.



STEVE...WHAT
USE IS WAR IF PEACE IS AN
IMPOSSIBILITY?



SHUT YOUR
EARS, CAP. THEY
DON'T WANT YOU...
THEY JUST WANT A
SUPER-SOLDIER'S
BODY IN THEIR
RANKS.


ARRGH!



HOLD ON,
CAP.

THIS MAY BE
YOUR LAST CHANCE,
STEVE. JOIN US.



Panel 1: Iron Man, in his iconic suit, stands in the foreground. Captain America is behind him, holding his shield. Iron Man has a determined expression. The background shows a city street with buildings.

DEFEAT ONE...
AND ANOTHER TAKES
ITS PLACE. THIS IS...
I CAN'T...

YOU'RE
LOSING ME
CAP

Panel 2: A medium shot of Iron Man and Captain America. They are looking towards a distant figure in a green suit, who is standing on a rooftop. The figure is surrounded by a bright green energy field. The background shows a city street with buildings.

THE
WAR ENDS,
STEVE

Panel 3: A close-up of Iron Man's face. He has a serious expression. The background shows a city street with buildings.

IT
REALLY
ENDS

DON'T LET
WHAT THE FALCON
SAID GET TO YOU,
CAP

WE'RE
STANDING IN THE
MIDDLE OF ONE OF
STARK'S PURGES. WE
HAVE TO GET OFF
THE STREETS

Panel 4: Iron Man and Captain America are running through a city street. They are looking back over their shoulders. The background shows a city street with buildings.

YOU WANNA
GET US BOTH
KILLED?



STARK IF YOU AN' YOUR IRON AVENGERS WERE ANY SLOWER, YOU WOULD HAVE HAD TWO MORE HYDRAS TO WORRY ABOUT.

ANY PROBLEMS?

JUST THE USUAL ONE

YOU KNOW THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO HE'S BEEN THROUGH MORE THAN ANY OF US

WELL, YOUR BUDDY, PRESIDENT OSBORN, ISN'T MAKING IT ANY EASIER ON HIM, EITHER



IT JUST BURNS UP THE GARBAGE, NOT THE BUILDINGS. STARK'S STILL INVENTING THINGS TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. ISN'T HE, CAP?

NOTHING'S CHANGED. RED-WING. NOTHING'S BETTER IF YOU BELIEVE IT IS, YOU'RE BELIEVING A LIE.



HI, STEVE. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

STEVE?



STEVE

IT'S NO, YOU, JAN HIM



THANKS, HANK

YOU TRIED, HONEY. THAT'S ALL ANYONE CAN ASK.



I'LL
TAKE CARE OF
THIS



JAN WAS TRYING TO BE
NICE, CAP THE .RON AVENGERS
KEEP HYDRA FROM TAKING
OVER NEW YORK. JAN WAS
JUST...

SHE'S
NOT JAN,
WYATT. YOU
KNOW THAT.
DOES STARK
REALLY THINK
HE CAN
CHANGE WHAT
HAPPENED
TO THE
AVEN-
GERS?



DEATH
SHOULD MEAN
SOMETHING,
REDWING



IS THAT WHAT YOU RIPPED OFF
OF THE HYDRA? IS THAT WHAT'S
BOTHERING YOU?

IT JUST LOOKS
LIKE THE PUNISHER'S
OLD INSIGNIA

IT'S
NOT

"IT'S A
SKULL



"IT'S A
RED
SKULL "

"Like one that on a lonesome road
doth walk in fear and dread,
and having once turned round
walks on,
and turns no more his head;
because he knows a frightful fiend
doth close behind him tread."
—The Rime Of The
Ancient Mariner,
Samuel Taylor Coleridge



ARTWORK BY ALEX ROSS

EARTH X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE



"Watcher?"

"Uatu, X-51."

"Sorry. I'm confused. I've met Spider-Man before. He had this tendency of making jokes in the most terrible of circumstances... so the idea of a day where he just quit and let the world go on without him... well, I guess that's acceptable."

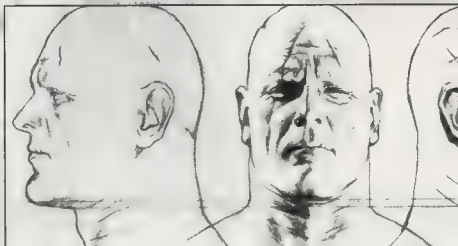
"You show great haste in your judgements, X-51. That is why you should not judge on the little you have seen. There is much to be revealed of the life of Spider-Man. You still have not..."

"Okay. Okay. Perhaps I am being unfair in my quick conclusions. My father warned me of this and said it was one of my most human flaws... which I believe really was a compliment, by the way... but I'm forgetting what I wanted to ask you... what about Captain America? If there were ever a man who embodied greatness and hope and the idea of perseverance in the face of impossible odds, it was Cap. How could what I've seen today be true? And the way his fellow heroes speak about him. He's a legend, but they spoke as if he were a liability."

"X-51. The future cannot always be watched from the standpoint of the past. What you now see cannot be limited to only what you have understood. The past can only give a context by which to explain part of the present—and the future is never what you expect."

"But how could Cap become... this? How could a man change so much?"

"Men are not stone, X-51. Nor are they steel. They are dirt and clay, molded by the hands of experience. Consider his context, X-51. Has it changed in the last 20 years? Look upon America and tell me what you see."





"PRESIDENT OSBORN'S AMERICA"

"I see... people in a state of panic. I see great hunger... and looting... and killing for food... and finally, peace. Why was everyone going hungry, Uatu?"

"You are the one with eyes, X-51. You tell me. What of the country's leadership?"

"I don't understand. Congress is empty. The White House is boarded up. Washington D.C is a shantytown. And yet, industry continues. Osborn Industry in particular. They seem to control everything."

"So at last, Norman has become the Goblin King."

"What does that mean, Uatu?"

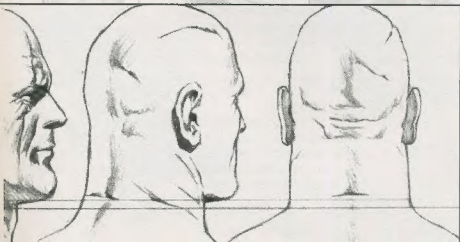
"Norman Osborn has been both a leader of men and the predator which feeds upon them, X-51. While he, indeed, was a man of wealth and industry, it masked his need for power. And mask he wore as well, as a super-villain known as the Green Goblin."

"The Green Goblin? I thought he was dead."

"Perhaps, X-51. Perhaps. What else do you see?"

"I see empty granaries and many people standing in line for food... in line at Osborn Industries. After they are fed, they go to work in homes and in offices owned by Osborn Industries. Everything and everyone seems to be owned by Osborn, but that's impossible... this is the... the red, white and blue, and..."

"Green... X-51. It was the land of plenty. The land of riches, yes. But the self-labeled least flawed nation of them all still had flaws. The want of money. The need for comfort. The acceptance of complacency."





"But that's not fair."

"It is laissez-faire, X-51. The game played since childhood is king of the mountain. One wins. Everyone else loses. Democracy was always America's weapon of suicide."

"... my father used to say that America was like a giant tree that couldn't grow much larger without a better inspection of its roots. He said the tree of liberty was the symbol of freedom... and people were more likely to cut off the limb they were sitting on for the sake of the pursuit of happiness than to recognize how important protecting that freedom was."

"Your father is dead, X-51. His words have been eaten by worms. Do not cling to their morality. You forget what I've said of good and evil."

"How can you just say that? I love my father. He was the most important person in the world to me. I owe him everything. How can you be so cruel?"

"X-51... have you failed to see all I have shown you? Perhaps you would think that life is cruel. That the struggle is cruel. But there is no such thing as cruelty. Cruelty suggests a moral imperative of which there are none. Look at what happened to your father. He died protecting you from the very people you were built to serve because he believed it was the right thing to do. Morality is cruel, X-51. I am not. And it is this morality that in the end, has destroyed Captain America."

"But even with this total dependence on Osborn Industries, wouldn't Cap still represent the dream of what America represented?"

"What part of the dream, X-51? No man is equal or will ever be equal again. The very thing Rogers believed and trusted in has been taken from him. His god is dead. Steve Rogers represented a collected people for so long... he can't go back to being himself, only a people who no longer exist."

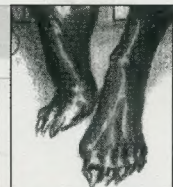
"But what about his friends? Even if the Avengers died, wouldn't there be others who could help him?"

"Perhaps you should look upon them."

" N I C K F U R Y "

"I don't understand, Uatu. There isn't one of him. There are many. Each speaks of wars long over. Each carries antiquated weapons that don't even have great effect on the super-powered populace. These 'Furies' aren't taken too seriously."





"They are Life Model Decoys, X-51. Robots. LMDs programmed with obsolete instructions much like yourself. But unlike you, they, like their source, are incapable of learning anything new."

"THE ORIGINAL HUMAN TORCH"

"The first android... died?"

"Not died, X-51. It ceased to operate. That was all."

"How sad... fighting its entire life only to find that no power on Earth could shut it down, it at last realized there was no power to ultimately sustain it."

"Nothing created by any single generation will last forever, X-51. You know that by now."

"SHARON CARTER"

"I had heard she and Cap had been close for many years, had fought Hydra together... only to become enemies in the end."

"Love is not the opposite of hate, X-51. But neither concepts hold any merit here. The Hydra you have described to me today is not the subversive terrorist organization Sharon Carter, that is, Agent 13, and Captain America fought against as allies. What has happened to her?"

"She's part of the alien Hydra now along with the She-Hulk."

"BLACK PANTHER"

"He is King of Wakanda. Cap gave him the Cosmic Cube after the death of the Red Skull. T'Challa was the only one Cap could trust to not take advantage of its power. But how could the Red Skull





be dead? I thought he was still alive. What about the mask that was taken off the Hydra?"

"Calm yourself. The past is like the present to a Watcher. Both exist together. The Red Skull may indeed be dead... but death has been cheated before."

" F A L C O N "

"I know he is part of the Hydra. I saw that before.

My question, Uatu, is why would someone join? Redwing warned Cap that he could resist it. Why would anyone accept this?"

"Perhaps the truth of the matter is that Sam Wilson and even Sharon Carter saw what Steve Rogers is just beginning to see."

"And what's that?"

"Twilight's last gleaming, X-51."

"What?"

"An end. An end to it all."

